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Creative Writing Workshop for Mental Rehabilitees

A Tool for Mental Health Work

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<p>This thesis is a production which aimed at producing a creative writing workshop for mental health rehabilitees. The purpose of this functional thesis was to explore the possibilities of using creative writing as a working method that could be utilised by professionals of social services. The implementation of the workshops was influenced by the theory of social pedagogy including the concepts of dialogue and empowerment. The workshop took place at Helmi Ry's premises during Spring 2014 and included seven sessions which were instructed as a pair work with a student colleague.</p> <p>The first two workshops included book binding in which each member of the group produced a personal notebook. This notebook was aimed to be used for the writing exercises. Book binding also allowed time for the group to get acquainted with each other. The next five sessions focused on producing text.</p> <p>A special feature of the workshops was flexibility and client-oriented approach. The meetings were aimed to be held in a conversational atmosphere. Client oriented approach meant that the group members had continuous opportunities to influence the course of the session by making certain choices. The sessions were planned in such manner that the timetable allowed us to make changes when desired. This type of working method required creativity and courage from the instructors.</p> <p>The feedback collected from the group at the last meeting, proved to be very positive. The course was described having been invigorating and helpful. Ideas for improvement were related to the length of the sessions as well as the total length of the course; according to the feedback, both the sessions and the course could have lasted longer.</p>	
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<p>Tämä opinnäytetyö on produktio, jonka tavoitteena oli toteuttaa luovan kirjoittamisen työpaja mielenterveyskuntoutujille. Tarkoituksena oli löytää työtapoja, joiden avulla olisi mahdollista järjestää toimiva työpajakokonaisuus tälle kohderyhmälle. Työpajan suunnittelussa ja toteutuksessa on painotettu dialogista työtettä sekä voimaantumisen teoriaa. Työpaja toteutettiin yhteistyössä Helmi Ry:n kanssa keväällä 2014 aikana. Työpajan kesto oli seitsemän kokoontumiskertaa, jotka ohjattiin parityönä yhdessä toisen opiskelijan kanssa.</p> <p>Työpaja työskentelyn kahden ensimmäisen tapaamisen aikana ryhmässä harjoitettiin kirjansidontaa, jonka tuloksena jokainen ryhmäläinen sitoi itselleen yksilöllisen viikon kirjoitusharjoitusten tallentamista varten. Viisi jälkimmäistä kertaa keskityttiin erilaisten kirjoitus tehtävien tekemiseen.</p> <p>Erityistä työskentelyssämme oli sen joustavuus ja asiakaslähtöisyys. Pyrimme ylläpitämään keskustelemaa ilmapiiriä koko työpajakaksen aikana. Ryhmäläisillä säilyi koko työskentelyn ajan mahdollisuus vaikuttaa työpajan kulkuun erilaisia valintoja tekemällä. Valmistelimme tapaamiset niin, että ne olivat helposti muokattavissa tilanteen mukaan. Tällainen työskentelymuoto edellytti ohjaajalta kykyä luovuuteen ja heittäytymiseen.</p> <p>Viimeisen tapaamisen yhteydessä ryhmäläisiltä kerättiin kirjallista palautetta työpajakokemuksesta. Palaute oli yksinomaan myönteistä. Kurssi oli koettu innostavaksi ja hyödylliseksi. Kehitysideat liittyivät lähinnä tapaamisten ja kurssin pituuteen. Yksittäisistä tapaamisista toivottiin pidempiä, ja samoin koko kurssista kokonaisuutena.</p>	
Avainsanat	mielenterveyskuntoutuminen, luova kirjoittaminen, voimaantuminen, dialogi

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1 Introduction

Mental health rehabilitees are at bigger risk of becoming excluded from the society compared to the general population, which causes significant burden to the public economy. The number of pensions granted due to mental health disorders has grown since the end of 1990s. In 2008 a total of 38% of all those receiving a disability pension, did so because of a mental disorders. (Hanhela, R. etc. 2009, p.279.)

Many of the rehabilitation services are still directed to the individual clients. (Koskisuu 2004, p.35). Promoting participation and inclusion contributes to the human growth and empowerment for instance through the raise of self-esteem. Moreover it can promote the acquisition of new skills and building of new contacts and networks. (European Commission 2002, pp.68-69.)

The objective of this functional Bachelor's Thesis is to organize a creative writing workshop for mental health rehabilitees. The idea is to arrange a course that has potential to support the rehabilitation process by enabling participation and empowerment as part of a group. The workshop was arranged in cooperation with Helmi Association. The idea for this thesis has its origin in a desire to find new ways to work in the field of mental health. As both of the students involved in the thesis process had special skills such as knowledge in book binding and creative writing, it was natural to utilize these skills for the contents of the workshop. The planning and implementation of the workshop is based on theories of empowerment and dialogue. The practice lies at the core element of our education: the social pedagogical framework.

The workshop was planned and implemented as a pair work by two students of social services. However my colleague Melina had to suspend school for the fall 2014 due to personal reasons which meant that I continued the writing part of the project on my own. Therefore a plural form is used when addressing the actualization process, but the report and analysis have been presented as my own.

2 The objective of this thesis

2.1 The objective of the writing course

Our aim was to arrange a writing course that would be tailor-made for our target group: mental health rehabilitants. The course was put into practice in endeavour to create an activity that could offer a chance for experiencing participation as well as personal empowerment as a member of a group. The emphasis of the group was in social interaction and creative writing.

2.2 Confining the topic

The thesis for a Bachelor's Degree consists of 15 credit points. The functional part of the project was rather time consuming as the course was spread out for a period of seven weeks. Therefore some choices have been made in limiting the broadness of the report. For example the types of mental health disorders are not introduced in this thesis.

2.3 Structure of the thesis

The first part of the thesis will introduce the field of mental health in general. After that the essence of mental health rehabilitation is explained. Then the role of the third sector becomes under discussion. The second part consists of explaining the perspective that is taken to creative writing during the workshop. After that the theory that has affected the planning and implementing the workshop is introduced. Then follows a description of the workshop process with a summary of each session. Finally the discussion part of this thesis highlights the most important learning outcomes and the level of reaching the goals that were set for this thesis process.

3 Mental health field in Finland

This chapter will highlight the backgrounds and the context of the thesis. First, the concept of mental health and mental health rehabilitation will be introduced. After that the role of the third sector in service structure is explained and followed by an introduction

of the working life partner. Finally the nature of mental health work from the perspective of a Bachelor of Social Services will be portrayed.

3.1 Mental Health Problems

People use the terms mental health and mental disorder in various ways in everyday language. The understanding that people have on the topics related to mental health are often coloured by cultural attitudes and beliefs as well as the way media represents issues related to mental health. News that are related to mental health are sometimes displayed in negative context and associated with words such as violence and risk. (Golightley 2011, pp.17, 18, 24.) However in Finland there has been some positive shift in the way mental health issues are presented in different media channels due to active campaigning of different organizations (Kuitunen and Valkonen 2015, p.9).

One way to define mental health is to suggest that it is about achieving one's potential as human being. Mental disorder for its part means any significant departure from a state of 'normal' health and includes diseases and illness. Mental disorder implies that a state of 'normality' once existed and therefore offers a chance to work with the person to rehabilitate them to that state, and is usually a temporary state. (Golightley 2011, p.23.)

There are many different perspectives that can be taken when examining topics related to mental health. Two that are very common in the professional world are the dominant medical model and the social model. The outlook that the professional has will strongly affect their work with a person who has a mental disorder. In social work the viewpoint is formed more towards holistic approach. (Golightley 2011, p.23.)

Mental disorders are a significant public health problem. They cause a lot of personal distress for people suffering from them as well as their loved ones. Mental disorders are also a major burden for the state economy, because they are often the reason for early retirements. Every third disability pension is granted due to mental disorders. This means a lot of direct pressure on the health- and social services as well as a lot of indirect costs in the form of lost labour input and decrease in productiveness. (Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriö 2012.)

The service structure is distinctively splintered. It has been a state strategy to disassemble the system that has been based on the existence of large mental institutions. It has been researched that service structure that emphasizes out-patient care has capacity to reduce the amount of suicides. The other developmental track has been the integration of the service system. This type of integration means combining units that offer mental health services and normal health care. The aim is to lower the stigma of mental health issues as well as enabling effective multi-professional care for the clients. (Wahlbeck 2010.) It has also been argued that there are not enough mental health services available and not all the people who would need them receive them (Mielenterveyden keskusliitto 2013).

So far the biological factors that affect mental health have been more under the spotlight in the society than experimental, environmental or social economical factors. In Finland the administrating and practising mental health services has been traditionally included as part of medical health care services. Therefore the investments have been mainly directed to care and rehabilitation rather than promoting good mental health. (Ruuskanen, Savolainen and Suonio 2011, p.148.)

The political emphasis has been on the promotion of mental health ever since the nineties. This outlook includes the social viewpoint which aims to improve the citizen's quality of life and resources for survival by developing environments and communities that can offer social support when needed. (WHO 2004, pp.11-12.)

3.2 Mental Health Rehabilitation

The concept of mental rehabilitation is rather broad and indefinite. It keeps on changing and reforming along with the surrounding society. Time, place and surrounding culture has an impact on how mental rehabilitation is commonly understood. Also the goals that are set for mental rehabilitation change according to the outlook that is taken on the matter. (Koskisuu 2004, p.10.)

One common way to view the target of mental rehabilitation is to consider the cost related issues that are related to mental health problems. According to this view the most important aim of mental health rehabilitation is to enhance the working ability of labour force and consequently reduce public expenses. The other considerable point of view emphasizes the rights of an individual. Happiness, independent life and fair treatment

are seen as building material of a good life. The challenge lies in the question, how is it possible to plan and execute services that take in to account both of these perspectives? (Koskisuu 2004, p.10.)

3.3 The Role of Third Sector

Finland is a nation that has rather active third sector. Third sector means all the non-governmental organizations that are not part of government nor a conventional for-profit business (Wikipedia 2015). In social- and healthcare sector the third sector produces complimentary services that are not defined in the law to be organized by the municipality itself (Seppelin 2011, p.5). In the national Plan for Promoting Mental Health Work and Social Work with Substance Abusers by the Ministry of Social- and Health Care the role of third sector is defined as follows.

Many associations are significantly important promoters of social inclusion as well as sense of community for example by coordinating and organizing peer support and leisure time activities as well as by offering possibilities for strengthening the sense of inclusion for those who would be otherwise marginalized or living in vulnerable conditions. The operational prerequisite of this type of associations should be supported.

Mental health problems are often related to other problems such as financial difficulties, social exclusion and poor living conditions (Ruuskanen, Savolainen and Suonio 2011, p.147). Therefore I see that it is important to have these services that have their doors open for all. Having no leisure time activities and suffering continuous loneliness can be burden to anyone's mental health.

Liisa Hokkanen (2014, p.75) uses a term 'happiness pocket' when she describes a community that limits their interactions within the community, as the expectations and preconditions coming from the outside are out of reach or seemingly strange. This type of limiting allows the members of the community to experience predictability and a sense of control as well as receiving positive feedback for their agency.

3.4 Helmi Association

Helmi Association is a classical example of a third sector agent at the area of mental health. They offer low threshold services without inquiring their client's diagnosis or other personal issues. The client receives help and assistance in issues related to

mental health and life control. The services are not strictly defined but tailor-made for each client at the time. Employees have the possibility to use a lot of personal judgement when delivering services for their clients. (Helmi Association 2015.)

Helmi Association (ry) was founded in 1983 by few individuals who had had mental illness related problems in the past. It is a union that advocates and co-ordinates activities for mental illness rehabilitees. It is a low threshold organization that is funded mainly by the City of Helsinki and Finland's Slot Machine Association (RAY). The values behind this work are respect of an individual, equality of all, responsibility and tolerance towards differences. (Helmi Association 2015.)

Helmi Association aims to influence government policy makers and better the care of mental illness sufferers in Finland. Helmi Association offers different types of services to improve the living conditions of mentally ill individuals. (Helmi Association 2015.)

Helmi Association has two locations in Helsinki. The main one is a beautiful wooden house in Pasila, and the second one is a smaller unit in Siilitie. Helmi Association has nine paid professionals and over thousand members. Helmi Association offers education and courses, peer support groups, arranged short trips abroad, case management services, counselling (on the phone) and possibilities for its members to earn little extra money through working in the kitchen for example. The premises are open for all the members to use for free time activities and socializing. The fee for the membership 15€ per year covers all services. (Helmi Association 2015.)

Helmi Association also publishes a magazine concentrates on the current issues under discussion in the field of mental health. It also offers information on cultural updates and upcoming event in arranged by Helmi Association. This magazine could also become one of the channels to publish some of the outcome of our works shop. (Helmi Association 2015.)

3.5 Mental health work

Mental health work is done by professional that come from various different educational backgrounds. This means that a lot of co-operation is required between different agents. All of these professions have their role in the rehabilitation process. (Koskisu 2004, pp.31-32.) Therefore it is usual that a Bachelor of Social Services works in a mul-

tiprofessional team. The professional role depends on the primary mission of the organization.

The work in the field of mental health has its own distinct nature. Mental rehabilitation for its part can be viewed as process that proceeds at its own phase. It is usual that good and bad times range in the rehabilitants life. Sometimes rehabilitation process can take leaps ahead while other times the clients condition can suddenly worsen. The professional role is to support the rehabilitation process at all times. (Koskisuu p.67.)

Mental health rehabilitants often experience stigmatization due to their illness. People often have preconception of mental health patients. In 2013 almost one fourth of Finnish people did not want to have any contact with a person suffering from a mental disorder. Anyhow the situation has improved in recent years. The stigma causes the rehabilitant to be at bigger risk of becoming isolated from the society. (Mielenterveyden keskusliitto 2013.) Therefore it is important as a professional to pay attention to practices that promote participation and inclusion to the surrounding society.

4 Creative Writing

This chapter explains how writing itself can be analysed in theory and why the creative approach to writing was chosen for this course.

4.1 Writing

Writing is a practical skill that nearly all Finnish people master. It can be used in everyday matters from writing down a shopping list to academic purposes in research. It is a skill that is often required by working life and studying world. Today many people also use their skills to express themselves by text messages and social media (Rongas 2011). Basic writing skills are taught in primary school and developed further in higher education. In a school setting teaching is always affected by the current curriculum in force.

There are different ways to define what writing actually is. Researcher of Finnish language and a teacher at University of Helsinki Kimmo Svinhufvud (2007, p.15) categorizes writing in three sections: text, the process of writing and the writing culture.

Text is the basically the outcome of the writing process. It has a physical appearance in paper, on computer or in some other form. Therefore it can be easily measured in numbers of pages or words for example. Text is also one unit of content. It forms a meaningful and purposeful entity. (Svinhufvud 2007, p.15.)

The process of writing for its part means the process that is followed by the formation of a text. This process can include brainstorming, drafting, writing different versions, editing, proofreading and many other functions. Basically this means the different stages of working with a text or strategies for writing a text. The other part of process is more abstract. This part is the cognitive process of the writer. Anyhow these processes are usually interlaced to each other while the writing is ongoing. (Svinhufvud 2007, pp.17-18.)

The third sector of writing is called the writing culture or the culture of writing. This means the customs and appreciations in the world of texts. The writing culture can exist in a small community level or even globally. Culture and traditions affect the writing culture and an individual writer can not write separated from this heritage. (Svinhufvud 2007, pp.18-19.)

4.2 Viewpoints to teaching writing

People have various different ideas and opinions what is writing and what makes a good writer. History has also shaped the normative outlook on texts and writing. The understanding and ideology of writing affects the teaching of writing. There are many ways to teach writing and many possible areas can be emphasized during a particular writing course. (Svinhufvud 2007, pp.53-55.) I think that it is important for anyone planning to organize a writing course or a workshop to recognize and be aware of the different understandings of writing practises.

English professor of linguistics and English language Roz Ivanic has categorized writing practises to six departments. This model clarifies the variety of approaches and

ideologies behind different practises. According to Ivanic writing can be examined from the following angles.

The first common understanding of writing is that writing is a skill. This discourse is based on the belief that writing is a practical skills which requires a lot of knowledge on linguistic patterns and rules and an ability to use them correctly. Therefore the assessment criteria in this approach emphasizes accuracy as the sign of a good text. (Ivanic 2004, pp.227-229.)

The second viewpoint is called a creativity discourse. This viewpoint also focuses on the written text but not in a similar way as in the skills discourse. In creativity discourse, meaning is central and within the process, the writer becomes a meaning maker. Hence the mental processes of a writer play an important role. (Ivanic 2004, pp.229-230.)

Within this discourse the writing has value in its own right, so no purpose or context for writing needs to be specified, and most of the content comes from the students' own experience. For this reason, a lot of the writing produced by these teaching approaches is personal narrative, descriptions of places or events within the learners' experience, fiction based on learners' experiences, and discussions of topics about which learners have knowledge and opinions. As a result, sensitive and aware teachers of writing have championed the value of writing which represents the experience, perspectives and 'voice' of learner writers from minority and disadvantaged backgrounds, challenging elitist ideas of what counts as an interesting narrative or topic to read about. (Ivanic 2004, p.229.)

The idea of learning in this discourse is rather different to other discourses. It emphasizes the importance of writing and reading a lot as well as the implicit role of the teacher. The text is seen as the product of the writer's creativity. The assessment criteria in this discourse, emphasizes the content and style. A typical word to describe a great text could be "interesting". (Ivanic 2004, p.230.)

The third discourse focuses on the process of writing. In this discourse it becomes vital to master the mental processes as well as the practical ones. These processes include planning, drafting, working on feedback, revising and editing. All of these stages are meant to better the outcome of the process which is the text. Therefore it is questionable whether it would wise to take the process in to account when assessing the text. However it is an important skill especially in work life to master the process of the writing as well as writing of a good quality text. There are also many strategies available to

help the process of writing which offers writing teachers great tools to work with students. (Ivanic 2004, pp.231-232.)

The fourth approach is called the genre discourse. In this viewpoint writing is seen as production of text-types that are shaped by social context. According to this approach learning to write includes learning the characteristics of different types of writing which are purposeful to use in specific contexts. Assessment criteria include appropriacy to contexts. (Ivanic 2004, pp.232-234.)

The fifth discourse is the one of social practise. This approach highlights the role of social interactions during the writing process. This means for example the networks of support and co-operation. This outlook on the matter views writing as purpose-driven communication in social context. One learn by writing for real-life causes, with real purposes for writing. Writing in this sense is seen as functional and purposeful activity. The criteria for assessment is the effectiveness in terms of purpose.(Ivanic 2004, p.234.)

The sixth approach is called a socio-political discourse. In this view writing is seen as socio-politically constructed practise. This outlook considers the social dimension to writing as well as the relationship between writing and power. (Ivanic 2004, pp.237-238.)

5 Guiding Theory

The following chapters will introduce the theories that guided the thesis process. First the theoretical framework of social pedagogy is shortly displayed as it has been the most central theoretical framework during the author's studies. After that, the theories of empowerment and dialogue will be examined in more detail, as they were the core theories to that inspire and shape thesis process.

5.1 Social pedagogical framework

The concept of social pedagogy is not easy to define. This is due to the fact that there are many possible ways to understand and analyse what social pedagogy is about. According to Juha Hämäläinen and Leena Kurki (1997, pp.10-21) the complexity of

defining social pedagogy comprehensively as a concept itself has a rich tradition and is culture dependent. Social pedagogy can be observed as a thinking and action taking tradition, which keeps continuously reforming its self-understanding, parallel to the changing society.

Social pedagogy is all about combining social and pedagogical views together. It is based on belief that it is possible to influence social circumstances through education (Hämäläinen 2003, pp.70-71). In social pedagogy the ideal is to bring theory and practice together in a fruitful way (Hämäläinen and Kurki 1997, p.11). The core question in is: how is society ought to respond to those individuals that have problems with integrating to the society (Hämäläinen and Kurki 1997, p.14).

In practical social work, social pedagogy should be understood as an educational orientation in which the world, people, social issues and social work are observed through social pedagogical lenses. Therefore social pedagogy can not be reduced to a set of methods but a way of reasoning and making decisions consequently through social pedagogical thought. (Hämäläinen 2003, p.76-77.)

The idea of man in social pedagogy emphasizes the continuous possibility for human growth and maturation during one's lifespan (Hämäläinen 2003, p.76). The central aim of social pedagogical work is to support the personal development and identity construction of the client (Hämäläinen and Kurki 1997, p.18-19). The promotion of people's social functioning, inclusion, participation, social identity and social competence in society remain essential aims of social pedagogical work (Hämäläinen 2003, p.76).

5.2 Dialogue

The word dialogue originated from the Greek words dia and logos. Dia translates to "through" and logos to "word" or "meaning". Primarily the word dialogue describes "a flow of meaning". (Isaacs 1999, p.19.)

Dialogical thinking takes into account that every human being has an individual experience of the world around us. The idea of dialogue is to create shared understanding and foster true human interaction. In relationships between workers and clients this means that there are two or more people leading the way. In reciprocal dialogue every-

one is granted a chance to compose the reality and create the necessary rules for it. (Mäkinen, Raatikainen, Rahikka and Saarnio 2009, p.139.)

The learning challenge in dialogue lies in postponing ones own inspirations and aspirations and putting those aside for a moment. The goal of the interaction is to learn to understand the views of the other person rather than trying to change them. This shared inquiry and reflection can not be done to people. It must be done together with people. (Isaacs 1999, p.9.)

5.3 Empowerment

Empowerment as a concept can be understood in many different ways and levels. It has become such popular theme in social work and other areas and work that the word empowerment verges on becoming part of everyday language. According to Adams (2008, p.17), empowerment can be defined as the capacity of individuals, groups and/or communities to take control of their circumstances, exercise power and achieve their own goals, and the process by which, individually and collectively, they are able to help themselves and others to maximise the quality of their lives.

This view by Adams displays the comprehensive nature of empowerment. It not only about changing perspective but also about changing the circumstances. It can be argued that empowerment without actual redistribution of power can not be considered empowerment. (Adams 2008, p.99.)

Power inhabits in peoples lives in many different forms. In relation to empowerment power can be explored from the following perspectives. The expression“ power over” describes a situation where one is in position to exercise positive or negative power over someone else. For example, parents can exercise a vast amount of power over their children. In positive sense this could mean support and protection while in negative sense abuse and neglect. The other dimension to distribution of power is called “power with”. Power with describes a situation where power is used collectively to reach agreed goals. (Mäkinen, Raatikainen, Rahikka and Saarnio 2009, p.134.)

A good example of practise that invites the client to dialogue and participation is the one developed by Paolo Freire. He worked as a teacher in Brazil and taught the poor to read. Freire believed that by activating the poor to become the subject of their own

learning they could become aware of the oppression they were suffering which would be the starting point for their struggle against the oppressors. (Freire 1996, p.49.)

According to Siitonen (1999, p.181) empowerment is a process or a set of events that arises from the individual himself and therefore can not be done to another person. Still the factors that shape the environment of the process can contribute to the results. Consequently empowerment is more likely to occur in a setting that fosters the process rather than hinders it. Elements such as freedom of choice, safety and appreciative treatment have potential in promoting the process empowerment.

It is important to recognize the relevance of self-empowerment in professional practise. It is very hard to work with anyone towards their empowerment without feeling empowered yourself. (Adams 2008, p.93.) Same applies to other forms of wellbeing such as being very tired. It is hard to activate others when ones own energy supply is empty.

6 Working with a group

The student pair working on this thesis project had only little experience on instructing groups. Therefore it was imperative to pay special attention to skills needed when instructing a group. However it must be taken into account that most of the time the group was rather small with only three or four participants. Consequently the theory that applies to bigger groups does not qualify to this project.

6.1 What is a group?

When examining from a social psychological perspective a group has some distinctive features that do not exist in a section of randomly together driven people. For instance, the people who are all waiting for the same bus, do not form a group. Features such as purpose, rules, roles and division of labour indicate the existence of a group. (Niemistö 2004, p.16.)

The change and activity that takes places during the lifetime of a group is called the group process. The idea to reach certain goals or at least develop as a group. Every-

thing that happens between the start and the end of a group shapes the general experience of the group. (Niemistö 2004, pp. 20-21.)

6.2 Instructing a group

There are many factors that have effects on the function of the group. Some of the factors are external such as the physical space and the basic mission of the group. Other factors are related to the group members. Groups usually have dual goals. One is to fulfil the basic mission of the group, the other one is to develop as a group. (Niemistö 2004, pp.34-36.)

The role of a group instructor is to lead the way for the group to fulfil their basic mission (Niemistö 2004, p.67). Therefore it is imperative for a group instructor to be aware of goals that have been set for the group.

One of the recipes for success in group instructing is careful planning. Planning involves the practicalities, aims, works methods and forms of evaluation for example. Planning also helps the instructor orientate oneself to his task of leading the group process. (Niemistö 2004, pp.68, 69, 75.)

7 Implementing the workshop

7.1 Planning

The planning of the workshops started fall 2013 when me and my pair Melina had a meeting with Helmi ry's representative. In that meeting we came aware of the wishes that Helmi Association had for our project. They were hoping the project would include minimum of 10 meetings and they also had a special wish of finding a peer instructor to continue working with the group in the future. These expectations for the course seemed too much when comparing them with the requirements that school had provided for the thesis process. However we were able to negotiate of the length of the course as well as the aims of the course. We felt that a goal of finding a peer instructor during a short course would be unrealistic. This implication was made mainly based on

special features of the client group such as difficulty in committing. An agreement was made of a writing course that would stretch over a seven week period, once a week 2x45 minutes at a time.

They were willing to provide us with the suitable premises to direct the workshop and were ready to help us with the marketing of the course. It was revealed that in January 2014 they would send their yearly letter to their members where the advertisement of our workshop could be attached. We agreed to schedule the work shop outside office hours so that also those members who have work commitments would have possibility to partake. It was also decided that the first two meetings the group would remain open for new people to join. After that the group was closed in order to promote safe atmosphere and the unity of the group.

Planning also involved considering the roles of the two instructors. It was decided that we would take turns in instructing the sessions depending on the topic of the session. While the other one took the responsibility of leading the group the other one had opportunity to observe the group activity.

After each meeting both instructors wrote a written reflection based of their experiences of the session. Reflection is a basic tool that is used in the field of social services as a means for evaluating the professional practise. Reflection offers a tool for the professional to become aware of the underlying factors that shape their practise. These factors include values and other bases that guide human action. (Mäkinen, Raatikainen, Rahikka and Saarnio 2009, pp. 47-50.) In this thesis project reflection worked as a learning tool and report method for both students.

The course structure was planned together by reflecting on the theory base. In social pedagogy the concept of common third is used in means of developing better relationships between the workers and client. Common third gives a name to activities that workers and clients engage in together. The idea is that doing something practical together opens up opportunities for relaxed conversation (Eichsteller & Holthoff 2012, p.36). We decided to use book binding as a common third that would help us to become familiarized with the group.

We wanted to promote dialogue during the meetings by inviting the group to a conversation with us about the contents of the course and next steps of each session. Also

we wanted to pose a question about the group members own view considering their learning needs instead shaping the goals for them. Our aim was to direct the group members attention to their own needs and wishes in order to activate them to become the subjects of their own learning. Mental health rehabilitation contains much more than the effort of trying to recover from a mental illness. The rehabilitant might also be recovering from other related phenomenon such as the hurt caused by discrimination, exclusion and different types of losses caused by the illness. (Koskisuu 2004, p.56.) Consequently it could be that the rehabilitants sense of control over their life has been lost. Inviting the client to dialogue enables him to take part in to shaping the reality of the group. Ones freedom to influence the situation brings one more responsibility. Shared power and responsibility ideally adds to group members commitment to the group.

7.2 Implementation

The implementation of the workshop took place in spring 2014. In this chapter I will describe shortly the contents of each session to give a more detailed picture of the workshop.

7.2.1 First session

The first session was opened up by serving coffee and introducing ourselves and the course idea. All the participant were asked to fill in a form that requested them to describe their relationship to writing in general, how much they write and what type of expectations they have for the course. The participants were also asked whether they would be willing to receive homework. After that the participants were asked to introduce themselves.

When the introduction part was finished, Kirsi-Marja stepped aside to observe while Melina started instructing book binding. Each participant was given the option to choose materials for book binding according to their own taste.

This session was affected by the fact that both instructors were filled with excitement. It was also difficult to work in a new environment that we had only seen once before as

there was nobody ask for advice. Luckily all the necessary items were found and we were able to start the course.

The outcome of the form inquiry was that the level of writing experience differed a lot between the participants. Some reported having difficulties to get even started while others already has a regular writing regime. However many mentioned suffering writing locks and were hoping for exercises that would “open the locks”. Majority of the participants were hoping to receive home assignments and on that account it was agreed that course would include home assignments.

7.2.2 Second session

The second sessions continued with book binding. Melina acted as instructor again while Kirsi-Marja observed the group. There were new people in the group so a short introduction of the course was displayed again. The participants continued working on their notebook. Melina paid extra attention in helping those who were new to the group.

The second session ended by providing the participants with their first writing exercise as homework. The aim of the homework was help the group to orientate to the forthcoming writing part of the course.

7.2.3 Third session

Third session closed the group. This time Kirsi-Marja worked as instructor as the writing part of the course started. Melina sat in another table observing the group. Each member was given a chance to read what they had produced as homework. Also feedback was given if the reader so desired. Each member wanted to read through their text which was a pleasant surprise.

Some short writing exercises were introduced. Group members worked intensively on exercises while Kirsi-Marja watched the clock. These exercises were not commented on as their task was simply to work as warm-ups. In between the exercises the group members were asked about their opinions of the exercises and their preference for the next exercise. Usually a few options were given and then through discussion it was decided which exercise would become next. The group members took part in to con-

versation actively. Our questions were such as: “Would you be interested in rehearsing writing about emotions next or would you prefer a short exercise on describing physical place?”

Depending on time consumption and the work tempo the exercises were carried forward in effort to balance between active writing and listening to others reading their texts. Many times we received feedback from the clients that they would have been pleased to write another hour. As a response to this request we promised to pass the message to Helmi Associations representative.

7.2.4 Fourth session

Writing part continued with Kirsi-Marja as instructor and Melina as observer. Homework was read through and commented as usual. Working with the group continued by engaging with short writing exercises. It seemed to the instructors that the group had internalized the work method of the course as the work proceeded very conveniently.

7.2.5 Fifth session

Melina took the as instructors role while Kirsi-Marja observed. Melina introduced exercises that can be found helpful in the planning stage of longer texts. She had also prepared an exercise that utilized using pictures as a source of inspiration.

This time one of the participants had problems in understanding the idea of some exercises. The situation was challenging for us as instructors as it seemed that the problem was not in the actual exercises as most of the group found them very simple. Our response was to simplify the exercise and emphasize the role of the exercise as only a tool to get started. Later when we reflected on the situation we realized that it could be that this particular member has learning difficulties in some area. Hence it raised our interest to expand our knowledge in diverse learning in the future.

At the end of this meeting Melina introduced the idea of having the workshop outside Helmi's premises the next time. Instant reaction to this from the group was negative even before we had introduced our ideas. However we decided to at least present the ideas we had in order to challenge the group. Our idea had been to visit a photograph

exhibition “Rasvaletti” in Hakasalmen Huvila and associate the writing exercises with the exhibition. Surprisingly the group changed their opinion after the introduction of the idea. All three participants expressed interest to spend the next meeting in Hakasalmen Huvila.

7.2.6 Sixth session

The sixth meeting was held in Hakasalmen Huvila. To our disappointment only one of the participants appeared to the exhibition. We let this member wander through the exhibition and take photographs in his/her own peace. After that we had a discussion in the coffee shop afterwards about the exhibition and the writing that could be done inspired by the photographs.

The situation was a bit unbalanced in a sense that there were two of the instructors present but only one participant. Nevertheless we thought that it is natural part of mental health work that needs to be accepted that sometimes the clients condition puts it own limits to participation.

7.2.7 Seventh session

The seventh meeting included final feedback and celebration. We had prepared some alcohol free punch and light food to create a festive atmosphere. We were happy to see that all the regular members took part and one had even brought a cake. Some of the participants had put extra effort in doing their homework. For instance, one participant had written four full pages of text for just one exercise.

During this last session we asked the group to give us written feedback on the contents of the course, the instructors practise and the course in general. We had prepared a form that had open ended questions and space for other comments. The feedback we received was very affirmative and pleasant. The course was described to have been “invigorating” and “useful” for instance.

8 Discussion

8.1 Summary of the project

The objective of this thesis project was to arrange a writing workshop for mental health rehabilitees. The aim was to create a course that would give the clients opportunities to experience participation and potentially personal empowerment as member of a group. Taking part to this group enabled the clients to interact socially and learn new skills. Our way of practise was based on social pedagogical framework and especially theories of empowerment an dialogue.

The functional part of the thesis project was implemented by two student colleagues. A lot of creativity was used in planning the group. As an example it was decided that the workshop content would combine book binding and creative writing. At the end we were very happy with this solution. Book binding as starter of the course posed a beautiful metaphor and a great start for the course.

The course lasted for a period of seven weeks and was ended with a celebration during the last meeting.

Ethical aspects were considered in the terms of our professional role. We introduced ourselves to the group as students of social services and emphasized the fact that we did not possess professional knowledge in the field of literature. Also it was discussed in the first meeting with the group that it would be necessary to refrain from relaying the personal subjects shared in the group with people outside the group. This was done as a precaution in a point where were not know the group yet.

8.2 Evaluation and feedback

Our observation diary as well as personal reflection after each session was our method for assessing our own practise as well as the progression of the workshop. This method worked very well with us. Personal reflection after each session helped us to keep our thoughts clear about what we were trying to reach and in which state of the process we were by the time.

The feedback gathered from the group was very encouraging to us. According to the feedback we had managed to reach our goals. Group member expressed enthusiasm that was not seen at the start of the group.

Also the feedback given from Helmi Association was supportive to us. The way people had spoke about the course had convinced the representative of the quality of the course. Helmi Association expressed their willingness to have us instructing another course for their members.

8.3 Assessment of the planning process

The planning process started by brainstorming and discussing as colleagues with same interest. Looking back it is easy to say that some of our ideas could have been more concrete and better expressed to each other. Some misunderstanding appeared in the middle of the thesis process. Also It would have been reasonable to go through in more detail the competence areas of both students. For instance we both had experience in mental health work, but at the same time our experiences were from very different areas of mental health work.

There was also a definite lack of information on how to lead through a functional thesis process. I think that it would have been helpful to read basic knowledge of the functional thesis process even before we started to plan the project.

8.4 Professional Growth

After the project I felt happy that I had had the courage to combine my interest in writing with my professional role. I think that some of my own enthusiasm was passed on to the group. The fact that I managed to survive through the stress and insecurity of undergoing the workshop project added to my self-confidence and experience from the field.

Working with a pair taught me a lot about collaboration and the relevance of good communication skills. I think that the best thing we could have done would have been rehearsing dialogue together. Sometimes it seemed that we were both too busy with

other school task and commitments that we forgot to encounter each other. And there we were aiming to practice dialogue with this group of clients.

Writing the report part of the thesis was more time consuming than I had expected. I found it very hard to manage my time between reading thesis related literature and writing the report. Also filtering of the source material proved to be challenging.

As an entity of the thesis process has been demanding in terms of perseverance. Especially the fact that I ended writing the report on my own required patience and self-discipline from myself. However I have had a great opportunity to learn about academic writing and articulation skills.

8.5 Future plans and ideas

I recommend that all those professionals in the field of social services that have skills and knowledge related to writing would consider whether using these skills with a client would serve a purpose. Creative writing as a method is easily approachable to many due to the fact that most people know how to hold a pen and form sentences on paper.

I would also be interest to learn whether a similar type of workshop would work with some other client group such as with young people for instance. It seemed that the interactive nature of the workshop had potential in keeping the interest of the participants.

I definitely think that a similar type of writing course could be arranged as a longer version. This type of writing group could also work as a refueling of inspiration to anyone who writes as a hobby.

My own professional aspirations include familiarizing myself with the concept of bibliotherapy which I think would be a natural continuum after this Bachelor's Thesis process.

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Project Plan

December

- 17.12.13 Meeting at HELMI ry
- Presenting our idea and discussing the course of action
 - HELMI ry will include advertisement of our creative writing group in their magazine at the end of January 2014.
 - For January: Plan how to market the course, choose the right wording and design the visual layout, also prepare a poster that can be displayed at the HELMI ry premises

January

- 7.1.2014 - Designing and finalizing advertisement
- 31.1.14 - Advertisement will be published in the HELMI ry magazine

February

- 11.2 - Workshop 1: Notebook binding
- 18.2 - Workshop 2: Notebook binding
- 25.2 - Workshop 3: Creative writing

March

- 04.3 - Workshop 4: Creative writing
- 11.3 - Workshop 5: Creative writing
- 18.3 - Workshop 6: Rasvaletti exhibition at the Hakasalmi villa
- 25.3 - Workshop 7: Final feedback and Celebration
- 27.3 - Meeting at Helmi association
- Final feedback with work life partner

June-August

Writing the thesis, completing theory parts and adding more sources

Poster



Luovaa kirjoittamista ja vihkon sidontaa!

Tervetuloa luovan kirjoittamisen kurssille!

Tiistaina 4.2.2014 klo 17-19
HELM ry
Pasilan Puistotie 7

Ensimmäisellä kerralla opit sitomaan vihkon kirjoitustehtäviäsi varten. Tapaamme 7 kertaa, sitoudut ryhmään vasta 2 tutustumiskerran jälkeen. Kurssi on HELMI ry:n jäsenille maksuton.

Osallistuminen ei edellytä aiempaa kokemusta, kurssi soveltuu niin vasta-alkajille kuin kynää reilusti heiluttaneillekin!

Kurssin vetäjinä toimivat kirjoittamiseen hurahtaneet sosionomi-opiskelijat Kirsi-Marja ja Melina.

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